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## Introduction

Author: Maxwell Woods

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Facultad de Letras, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

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# INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

MAXWELL WOODS<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is the introduction to the English translation of *Ameréida* published later by *ESLA*. All references to the English translation are in reference to this work. Research funding for this project is thanks to the Chilean National Agency for Research and Development (Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo de Chile) (ANID), FONDECYT Initiation project No. 11220089, “Mythical Urbanisms: Myth and the Decolonization of Cities.

<sup>2</sup> Maxwell Woods is assistant professor in the Department of Literature at the Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez in Viña del Mar. In addition to publishing a monograph about the Open City and *Ameréida* titled *Politics of the Dunes: Poetry, Architecture, and Coloniality at the Open City* (Berghahn Books, 2020), his most recent book, *On the Chilean Social Explosion*, exploring the protests that erupted in Chile between 2019 and 2020 was published by Routledge in 2022.

First published in the Chilean port city of Valparaíso in 1967, the motivation behind *Amereida* was simultaneously daunting and simple: to write the epic of the American continent.<sup>1</sup> A combination of “America” and *Eneida* (the Spanish title for the *Aeneid*), the poem presents itself as the American equivalent of Virgil’s attempt to conceptualize the mythical founding of the Roman empire. As one of the lead authors of the text, Godofredo Iommi, would argue over a decade later, “that almost inexplicable desire to want to know what it is to be American (which supposes that there is something that is not)...[is] the only really American thing” (Iommi 211). *Amereida* is an epic response to this provocation, interrogating what it means to be American and constructing an identity around that interrogation.

Since its publication, *Amereida* has perhaps become most well-known within international architectural circles. The epic was initially published by the School of Architecture of the Catholic University of Valparaíso (today, the School of Architecture and Design [EAD] of the Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso), and many of its authors were members of the school’s faculty. Subsequently, the text became the foundation of a required class for all students of EAD, the *Taller de Amereida* [the *Amereida* Workshop], in which students ask themselves not only what it is to be American, to return to Iommi’s phrasing, but what it means to be an American architect or designer. This epic has enabled the development of an architectural and design school significantly invested in an independent mode of design from that offered by the European canon. The praxis of *Amereida* is the concrete development of an architectural school rooted in Latin American experience and identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this introduction “America” refers to the entire hemispheric America (what in the USA is usually referred to as North, Central, and South America), not the United States.

Perhaps the strongest manifestation of *Amereida's* continuing architectural influence is the Open City of Ritoque. Founded in 1970, three years after the publication of *Amereida*, the Open City is a community of architects, artists, and poets (as well as today scientists, musicians, dancers, and others) who have dedicated themselves to exploring how poetry and architecture could interact to create a novel mode of urban habitation rooted in the particular characteristics of the American continent. Indeed, a central element of the group is a profound connection with the territory along the Chilean coast only a few dozen miles north of Valparaíso that constitutes the Open City. At the foundation of this group's activity is now and has always been *Amereida*. The epic is quoted at meetings, read at community events, and used to conceptualize new projects. Today, the Open City is known across the world for its stunning experimental architecture, with the group participating in events like *documenta* in 2017, and *Amereida* is the conceptual core on which their activity rests.

This story—*Amereida* is published in 1967 and then subsequently finds its full architectural expression with the works of EAD and the Open City—has been well rehearsed in architectural criticism with books like Ann Pendleton-Jullian's *The Road That Is Not a Road* (1996) and Fernando Pérez Oyarzún and Rodrigo Pérez de Arce's (2003) *The Valparaíso School: Open City Group*. Within these debates, *Amereida* is frequently, and not without reason, treated as a manifesto of sorts that serves primarily to outline the philosophical foundations of EAD and the Open City. As such, the epic is often used to understand architecture and design, only rarely being treated as a literary text. One is more likely to encounter *Amereida* in an architecture classroom than in a course on the epic, world literature, Latin American literature, and so on. As a result of the architectural interest in EAD and the Open City, *Amereida* has come to be seen primarily as an architectural text (even if poetic), not a literary one.

One of the goals of this translation and critical edition of *Amereida* is to provide a base from which teachers, students, and general readers can begin to dig into the epic's complex, provocative, and not always innocent themes. That is, the translation will hopefully serve to reorient the reception of *Amereida* as a literary work, and not just as a conceptual foundation for a group of architects living at the Open City and working at EAD. This introduction therefore serves a simple purpose: introduce the particular context in which the poem came to be (i.e., a pre-history of the poem itself) and the general context in which the poem was published (i.e., the cultural and political context), as well as to give a few guidelines for readers trying to decipher the text. I will then conclude with a few notes on citation, bibliography, and the translation.

### **The particular background and story of *Amereida***

The pre-history of *Amereida* is that of two parallel life stories converging in Chile in the 1950s and flourishing together in that decade and the subsequent 1960s. On the one hand, we have the history of the poet, Godofredo Iommi. Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1917 to anarchist working-class Italian immigrants, Iommi's poetic career arguably started in 1940 when he undertook a journey through South America with what was named the "Holy Brotherhood of the Orchid," composed of Iommi, Gerardo Mello Mourão, Abdias do Nascimento, Juan Raul Young, Napoleão Lopes Filho, and others.<sup>2</sup> Today, the group is perhaps best known because it was on this trip that the Afrocentric Brazilian artist, Abdias do Nascimento, witnessed a racist black-face performance of *Othello* leading to his subsequent radical anti-racist artistic career (a connection with the Open City and EAD that is rarely if ever mentioned).<sup>3</sup> Yet it was also on this trip that Iommi tried to put these experiences and

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<sup>2</sup> Unable to confirm their participation, I've also seen references to the participation of Efraín Bo and Francisco Coelho.

<sup>3</sup> In conversation at the Open City, I have been told that Nicolás Guillén's Afro-Cuban poetry was also significant for Iommi's work, with Iommi reciting the poetry at classes at EAD and at the Open City.

his relationship to America into dialogue with the European epic tradition, reading aloud passages from Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the original Italian to the entire group (Chávez). Here, one witnesses the first step of what will eventually become *Amereida's* epic voice: putting a European-originating poetic tradition into contact with American reality. Godofredo Iommi was asking a simple question: What does it mean to read Dante in America?<sup>4</sup>

Upon returning to Buenos Aires, Iommi collaborated with his sculptor nephew, Claudio Girola, as well as other artists from around Buenos Aires who were working within new modernist currents of concrete art (Crispiani). This was the era immediately after Joaquín Torres-García's lectures in Montevideo, in which he famously proposed a constructivist "School of the South" independent of Europe and the inversion of the map of America in order to insist upon the cultural autonomy of Latin America (Torres-García). As Alejandro Crispiani (208) has convincingly argued, Iommi's relationship to this group was distant at best. Nonetheless, Girola would eventually become part of EAD and the Open City (in fact, he is buried at the Open City's cemetery), and it is undeniable that Torres-García's inverted map of America had a direct influence on *Amereida* given that his idea is quite literally reproduced within its pages. These attempts to imagine an autonomous Latin American modernism were at the base of the project of *Amereida*.

Simultaneously, in Santiago de Chile, an up-and coming-architect, Alberto Cruz, began experimenting with modern architectural ideas, eventually teaching courses on modern architecture and design at the Catholic University of Chile in Santiago in the late 1940s (Torrent). Here, Cruz began to form a community around new modernist trends and to build a name for himself as a groundbreaking architect introducing Chile to new waves of

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<sup>4</sup> He is not the only one. At almost the same time as *Amereida*, the Black Power poet, Amiri Baraka, published his reinterpretation of Dante, *The System of Dante's Hell* (1965). One implicit recommendation of this introduction is to begin putting *Amereida* into conversation with these similar endeavors.

architectural thought and practice. These three trends in modernism—modern architecture in Chile, concrete art, and Torres-García’s call to generate an autonomous Latin American modernism—fed *Amereida*’s aesthetic core.<sup>5</sup>

In the late 1940s, Iommi moved to Chile where he and Cruz met, striking up a friendship that would last the rest of their lives. This partnership would eventually come to mark the activity of EAD and the Open City, with Iommi representing the poetic word and Cruz carrying forth that word in architectural production. This relationship—poetry was the foundation and architecture gave form to the poetic word—is at the core of the subsequent work of EAD and the Open City.<sup>6</sup>

This relationship between the poetic word and architecture began to be institutionalized in the early 1950s. In 1952, Cruz received an invitation from the Catholic University of Valparaíso to be the new director of their School of Architecture. He accepted on the condition that they would additionally hire a group of his collaborators, including Iommi. This produced the strange situation continuing until today of a School of Architecture and Design that always has at least one poet (if not many) as members of its faculty.

As this group continued to develop its style throughout the 1950s and 1960s,<sup>7</sup> Iommi took an extended trip through Europe, especially France and Germany.<sup>8</sup> It was during this time that Iommi was called upon to fully consider what it means to be specifically American, in contrast to being European. Upon returning to Chile, Iommi took on this new mission. In

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5 I am, of course, not including all influences. Famously, in Chile, Iommi was briefly a student of the Chilean avant-garde poet, Vicente Huidobro. His split from Huidobro was simultaneously philosophical (the relationship between Iommi’s and Huidobro’s poetics beyond their avant-garde surface is complicated) and personal (Huidobro’s wife left him in order to marry Iommi). Additionally, Pendleton-Jullian has carefully outlined the influence of European modernism on Iommi and Cruz. Indeed, their works are filled with references to classic European modernist authors, artists, and architects.

6 Those at the Open City have informed me that this relationship between the poetic word and architecture did not appear in the writing and thinking of Alberto Cruz until the late 1950s and early 1960s.

7 For a full exploration of this period, see Pérez Oyarzún and Pérez de Arce.

8 Pendleton-Jullian has explored the importance of this trip in depth.

order to realize this project, he and a group of others undertook a collective voyage in 1965 through South America similar to the Holy Brotherhood of the Orchid with the intended purpose of encountering the reality of the American continent. While the core of this group was composed of members of the EAD faculty (Alberto Cruz, Godofredo Iommi, Fabio Cruz, and Claudio Girola), other participants came from France (François Fédier,<sup>9</sup> Michel Deguy, and Henry Tronquoy), Panama (Edison Simons), England (Jonathan Boulting), and Argentina (Jorge Pérez-Román). Reflections on the journey by each participant were subsequently edited into a poetic epic collage that would be *Amereida*. Additionally, thoughts by others like Gerardo Mello Mourão were included in the final work. As such, *Amereida* is a multivocal epic without a singular author, but instead a principal editor: Godofredo Iommi, who was also the primary catalyst for the journey and poetic production.

I have skipped over many other details of the pre-history of *Amereida*: Iommi in the 1960s reciting sections from Ercilla's *Araucaniad* (the earliest Chilean epic about the Spanish conquest of the territory),<sup>10</sup> perhaps a catalyst for his conceptualization of *Amereida* given that Ercilla uses elements of *The Aeneid* in his text; the full development of Iommi's avant-garde poetic theory beyond the limited influences listed above;<sup>11</sup> Alberto Cruz's initial foray into conceptualizing an alternative modernity in the 1950s;<sup>12</sup> and so on. Moreover, this is not to mention the multiple influences brought to the project by the other authors. For instance, what do we make of the influence of the particular poetic trajectory of Michel DeGuy? Fédier's Heideggerianism? I have tried to introduce some key influences on *Amereida* that will help the reader, but there is a treasure trove of unexplored fields to interrogate within the epic's pages.

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<sup>9</sup> Fédier is principally known for his defense of Martin Heidegger.

<sup>10</sup> Manuel Sanfuentes alerted me to this.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Pendleton-Jullian's careful analysis of the influence of European modernism on Iommi.

<sup>12</sup> I have discussed this elsewhere (Woods, "The Present, the Modern, and Modernization").



### **Amereida's cultural context**

This particular story of *Amereida's* pre-history finds resonance in the broader Latin American moment of the 1950s and 1960s. As Mariano Siskind argues, following the Cuban Revolution,<sup>13</sup> Latin America experienced an explosion of reflections on the question: What does it mean to be American? Or alternatively, what is Latin America's cultural identity when it claims its political autonomy from the United States and Europe, as the Cuban Revolution was frequently perceived? In short, Iommi's recurring question—What does it mean to be American?—was reverberating across the Western Hemisphere. As a result, we see dozens of attempts to rethink Latin American identity: through a theoretical lens—Roberto Fernández Retamar's *Calibán* (1971), Rodolfo Kusch's *America Profunda* (1962), José María Arguedas's anthropological and literary work in Peru; through a reinvention of the epic—for instance, in Chile, Gabriela Mistral's posthumously published *Poema de Chile* and Pablo Neruda's *Canto General* (1950);<sup>14</sup> through cinema—the famous Latin American Film movement of the 1960s and 70s, with the 1967 Latin American Film Encounter occurring right next to EAD (Trumper; Baugh); and through the development of new literary genres like magical realism (Siskind; Woods, "Americanismos").

In terms of its content, therefore, *Amereida* is not an eccentric text. As a literary work, it can be read alongside this popular current of the 1960s to reimagine what it means to be American. Decoupling the epic from the Open City and EAD allows one to perceive how the work was participating in a broader cultural moment. This opens up the work to be read not

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13 In an informal conversation with one of the founding members of the Open City, Fidel Castro was categorized as a "hero," though said founder subsequently distanced himself from the later developments of Castro's administration. Of course, this recollection is countered by other perspectives by members of the Open City who emphasize the effect of the movement against the Vietnam War or attempt to distance the Open City from any connection to the social and political movements of the time.

14 I mention Neruda's work from *before* the Cuban Revolution to also point out that this questioning of Latin American identity did not appear out of nowhere after 1959.

only as a manifesto of an architectural collective and school—although it can undoubtedly be read as such—but additionally it can be put into dialogue with the multiple strands of Latin Americanism that were flourishing across the continent at that time. In short, although *Amereida*'s connection to European modernism has now been analyzed in depth, the work should also be read in dialogue with the broader conversations about Latin American identity occurring across the continent in literature, philosophy, film, art, and so on.

### **Toward a critical engagement of *Amereida***

The significant question, then, is: What is the intervention offered by *Amereida* in the debates regarding Latin Americanism? Perhaps the guiding framework with which to understand *Amereida* is its polyvocality. Rather than being an organic text with a singular authorial voice, the epic is more properly a collection of fragments stitched together by the editor, Iommi. For instance, the comment on translation found on page 84 of *Amereida* is in fact ripped from one of Michel Deguy's other collections, *Actes*;<sup>15</sup> Edison Simons signs his contribution with "edi" (11); residents at the Open City have informed me that the reflection on Marxism was written by Mello Mourão (166-7); and the extensive discussion of architecture and art in the middle of the work is often seen as primarily the work of Alberto Cruz (89-124). Undoubtedly, many of these authored fragments were the results of collaboration, and individual interventions are made in the middle of others' fragments. A full mapping of the individual authorship of each fragment of *Amereida* is research that needs to be conducted in the future.

Yet this illuminates an oft overlooked element of the work: it is a collection of fragments often produced individually, though with the common thread of the 1965 journey

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<sup>15</sup> Thanks to Manuel Sanfuentes for this discovery.

through South America uniting them. The result is that the work is far from being a harmonious, organic work, with José Vial, for instance, detailing in a letter to Francisco Méndez the chaos with regards to the planning of the 1965 journey as well as the various tensions between members of the voyage and members of the EAD faculty. Rather than seeing the work as a whole with a clear thesis, it is often more beneficial to see it as the collection of multiple voices in (not always coherent or harmonious) dialogue.

This illuminates another element of *Ameréida* that has received little recognition: a large part of the epic is composed of direct citations of colonial-era chronicles. This is perhaps overlooked because of the poem's lack of bibliography and punctuation, meaning that no quotation marks or footnotes are present to alert the reader to the quotations. Below I have included a list of all of the citations of colonial-era chronicles in the poem:

- P. 16, "which is...lawful to call": Amerigo Vespuccio, *The Letters of Amerigo Vespucci and Other Documents Illustrative of His Career*, trans. and ed. Clements R. Markham. Burlington: Ashgate, 2010, p. 42.
- P. 23, "it is a great sea...names": Oviedo, *Historia general y natural de las indias*.<sup>16</sup>
- P. 32-4, "and we sailed...the pole": Letter from Vespucci to Queen Isabel, "VII: Vespucci's 'Second' Voyage," *Amerigo Vespucci*, trans. Frederick Ober, New York: Munsey's, 1897, paragraphs 19-21.
- P. 135, "I remembered...charts": Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, trans. Alfred Percival Maudslay, London: Hakluyt Society, 1908, p. 15
- P. 135-6, "a little further...out of use": Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *First Part of the Royal Commentaries of the Yncas, Volume 1*, trans. Clements R. Markham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 32

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<sup>16</sup> I have not been able to find an English translation of this segment.

- P. 136-7, “and named...the indians”: Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *First Part of the Royal Commentaries of the Yncas, Volume 1*, trans. Clements R. Markham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 28
- P. 138, “having sighted...tierra firme/the mainland”: Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *First Part of the Royal Commentaries of the Yncas, Volume 1*, trans. Clements R. Markham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 38
- P. 139, “already on board...bay of the bad fight”: Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, trans. Alfred Percival Maudslay, London: Hakluyt Society, 1908, p. 25
- P. 140-1, “so it was called...the one from the other”: Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *First Part of the Royal Commentaries of the Yncas, Volume 1*, trans. Clements R. Markham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 38
- P. 143-152, “afterwards...much sought”: Antonio Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage: A Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation*, trans. R.A. Skelton. New York: Dover, 1994, Chapters X and XI.
- P. 159-60, “he was still panting...immense ruin of canudos”; Euclides da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, trans. Samuel Putnam. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944, p. 441
- P. 162, “the situation of america...the last period of america”; letter from Simon Bolívar, 1830. I have not found a full translation of the letter in English, but have found fragments cited in larger articles. Ibsen Martinez, “The Pessimistic Neighbor,” *Econlib*, 7 April 2008, <https://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/y2008/Martinezneighbor.html#footnote0>; Donald T. Fox, Gustavo Gallón-Giraldo, and Anne Stetson, “Lessons

of the Colombian Constitutional Reform of 1991: Toward the Securing of Peace and Reconciliation?”, in *Framing the state in times of transition: case studies in constitution making*, ed. Laurel Miller and Louis Aucoin. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010, p. 467.

All of this information has been carefully detailed in the annotated version of *Ameréida* that can be found on the EAD-run website, *Casiopea*. For those interested in the Spanish versions of these quotations, citations can be found there. The *Casiopea* online version of *Ameréida* is also beneficial as it gives information regarding the individual names, places, and things mentioned throughout the work that may otherwise not be recognizable by readers.

This polyvocality is perhaps the best indicator of the Americanism found in *Ameréida*: America is defined as a continent in which a multiplicity of voices come into contact. Rather than proposing a singular and coherent definition of the American identity, the epic offers a collage of competing definitions of what defines America. In brief, we see in *Ameréida* the tension behind the epic outlined by Sneharika Roy. On the one hand, Roy notes, the epic seeks to unify a “people” around a common identity, in this case the American identity. On the other hand, she continues, each and every epic is defined by migrating traditions, a plurality of voices, and intertextuality. *Ameréida* embodies this contradictory nature of the epic: the desire to unify a diverse set of distinct voices while simultaneously not annulling their differences and autonomy.

What seems to unite these voices, however, is that there is a heavy influence from Europe-originating cultural forms. The question posed by the poem is that of the transposition of European culture onto a foreign continent. In short, if we accept Edward Said’s (9) distinction between imperialism—“the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating

metropolitan center ruling a distant territory”—and colonialism—“the implanting of settlements on distant territory”—*Amereida* is an imperial epic. As a text, it primarily situates itself from within the culture of the colonial metropolitan center. The citation of colonial-era chronicles is case in point: the founding texts of *Amereida*’s American identity, regardless of their polyvocality, are those that shaped the attitudes of Spain towards its colonies. Within *Amereida* there is an identification with the culture of the agents of settler colonialism. If *Amereida* interrogates what it means to be American, it is primarily concerned with how said American identity has been conceptualized from within an imperial paradigm.

The appeal to Virgil’s *Aeneid* is symptomatic of this identification. The dominant interpretation of *The Aeneid* has been that it is a glorification of the foundation of the Roman empire. It is in effect a justification of colonial expansion and Roman dominance over foreign territories. Indeed, in the first book Jupiter famously promises that Aeneas’s descendants will have “imperium sine fine”/“empire without end” (1.279). To identify with the *Aeneid* is apparently to identify with the colonizer.

That said, ever since Adam Parry’s “The Two Voices of Virgil’s Aeneid” (1963), it has been noted that Virgil frequently highlighted the pain and suffering visited upon innumerable individuals and communities as a result of Rome’s founding.<sup>17</sup> Parry even makes a comparison between Aeneas’s domination of various Italian peoples and the Indigenous nations dominated by the Spanish, English, Portuguese, and French empires, arguing that Trojan Aeneas conquering the Marsi—a people that “represented the original Italian stock” for Virgil—has “something in common with” the fate of Indigenous nations in America (68). In this interpretation, the *Aeneid* is a critique of imperial expansion.

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<sup>17</sup> This is cited since it is seen as the starting point of this interpretation within Virgil studies (Cussen). Nonetheless, given that Chilean colonial-era epics like Ercilla’s *Araucaniad* were already using the *Aeneid* to lament the violence of the conquest, Parry was by no means the first to consider this thesis.

*Amereida* seems to frequently side with this more critical interpretation. The quotation of Bolívar's claim that America is "ungovernable for us" (161) (with 'us' apparently meaning *criollos*), the citation of Euclides da Cunha's profile of a Black revolutionary at Canudos (159-160), the direct critique of Columbus's invasion of the continent (13-4), the critique of those who want to *flatten* America's reality (160), and so on all speak to a rejection of the colonial domination of the continent. *Amereida* seems to propose the following: the imperial imposition of European-originating cultural traditions onto what was named "America" is failed, and a non-imperial dialogue might be formed between Europe and the American reality (something that would then correspond to a non-colonial political and economic relationship).

In other words, *Amereida* addresses a very particular perspective. On the one hand, it is a product of imperial culture. Without the colonial chronicles, without Virgil's *Aeneid* (as well as the *Aeneid*'s legacy in Latin America of being used to justify colonization), without the material reality of settler colonialism, *Amereida* does not exist. On the other hand, there is a conscious attempt to interrogate, challenge, and critique the legitimacy and desirability of that colonial and imperial order. It would be inappropriate to call *Amereida* a decolonial text—it is written by those who are situated squarely within imperial culture—but it does correspond conceptually with attempts to imagine "decolonial options" (Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*).

Perhaps a look at another text by Iommi will help explain. In 1972, a group of poets, artists, and musicians, including Godofredo Iommi, put together a series of Odes based on Bernardino de Sahagún's recordings of the Indigenous Nahuatl worldview. In the introduction to the work, Iommi concludes with a central guiding question, "How do we inherit this [Nahuatl cultural practices], we who are not Indigenous?" (119) Without question, Iommi

in particular and *Amereida* in general frequently reproduce imperial ideology. In that very introduction to the Odes, for example, Iommi continuously talks of Nahuatl as if it were a dead language, ignoring that it is still today spoken by over one million people belonging to very much alive Indigenous communities. Nonetheless, the underlying guiding framework of Iommi's question and *Amereida* remains: What is the relationship between *criollo* and Indigenous worlds? What does it mean to put what has traditionally been *imperial* culture into contact with Indigenous and Black cultures in a non-imperial fashion? Returning to the Holy Brotherhood of the Orchid, what does it mean to be reading Dante's *Divine Comedy* on the same trip that Abdias do Nascimento had his revelation with regards to his future anti-racist artistic career?

This question is not without its problems. First, the American identity explored in *Amereida* seems to exclude Black and Indigenous peoples from being American. Yes, it critiques the colonial violence perpetrated against Black and Indigenous bodies and communities as well as the land theft that constituted colonial invasion, but it also ignores the possibility that those very same peoples may articulate a distinct American identity that they occupy and claim. Being American is not exclusively a European-originating endeavor. This is perhaps clearest in the simultaneous identification of the Black Brazilian sculptor, Aleijadinho, as a prototypical American (101) and the example of the Black Revolutionary at Canudos as the victim of settler colonialism. Black and Indigenous peoples are the foil against which American identity is defined, not active participants in the formation of America. Within *Amereida's* framework, it is difficult if not impossible to take into account arguments like that of Wilson Harris, "Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe are as much the heritage of black men and women as of white men and women" (qtd. in Callahan 121). This idea is not thinkable within *Amereida's* paradigm.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This idea is a reproduction of a deeper discussion I conducted elsewhere (Woods 2020).



Even more radically, *Amereida* ignores that many Black and Indigenous communities have rejected the name, America, altogether. In a 2018 article, for instance, Emil' Keme argues that "For Abiyala to Live, the Americas Must Die." Here, Keme argues that the European imposition of the name, "America," onto the continent was an imperial act, and recommends turning to an Indigenous name for that same continent: Abya Yala. *Amereida's* founding question—What does it mean to be American?—is itself a reflection of imperial culture. Elsewhere, in *The Idea of Latin America* Walter Mignolo has argued that the idea of Latin America is imperial.<sup>19</sup> In this case, the question is not of how to imagine a non-imperial American identity, because to insist on the primacy of an "American identity" is always already to situate oneself within imperial culture.

This leads to the second problem of this question: Indigenous voices are never substantially included in *Amereida's* collage. With texts like the seventeenth-century chronicle, *Nueva crónica y buen gobierno*, written by the Indigenous Quechua author, Guaman Poma de Ayala, already available at the time of *Amereida's* publication, not to mention the millions of Indigenous persons living throughout Chile and Latin America, it is notable that they are excluded from speaking in the epic. Yes, *Amereida* is a critique of imperial culture by those who received their poetic, architectural, artistic, and cultural formation from within that culture, but it never actually generates the dialogue between Indigenous and *criollo* culture that the epic critiques Spanish and Portuguese colonialism, as well as the various Latin American republics (let us not forget the citation of Bolivar), for never having accomplished. In this sense it remains an imperial text insofar as it centers that metropole's discourses and cultural forms.

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<sup>19</sup> Mignolo's thesis is complicated by other research (McGuiness).

If I have put forth these shortcomings—and I have not mentioned them all (most notably the total absence of any feminine voice in the epic, the American identity is strictly a masculine affair in *Ameréida*)—it is because this translation seeks to catalyze debates within studies of the Open City of Ritoque, EAD, and *Ameréida*, opening up new paths for discussion. Furthermore, this translation hopes to reshape current ideas of the Americanism of the 1960s. *Ameréida* was and continues to be an influential epic within Chile. Its deviations from the dominant debates of Retamar, Neruda, Mistral, Arguedas, and so on allow us to reconsider what defines the ideology of Americanism.

### **Keys to reading and bibliographic issues**

*Ameréida* is often perceived as an esoteric and/or experimental text that is difficult to approach. For this reason, I offer two aids to reading the epic. First, the extended spaces serve as substitutes for punctuation. Excluding exclamation marks and question marks, *Ameréida* contains no punctuation. Faced with the logistical task of separating clauses and appositives—or perhaps the task of reproducing the pauses between breaths of the speaker in order to represent the orality discussed in Manuel Sanfuentes's contribution to this issue—the authors utilized extended spaces. When reading, one can therefore use these spaces to understand the structure of sentences. Each extended space is in fact a punctuation mark (or breath). Second, the poem is not a monolith but is instead a collage of multiple prose and poetic fragments. How to divide the poem into these fragments is, of course, the work of the reader. But one can approach the text as one approaches a novel or any other epic: dividing the work into chapters/books/poems, and then understanding the relationship between that section and the whole.

A few issues of bibliography and citation need to be explicitly discussed. I wanted the introduction to serve as a presentation of some of the ideas found in *Ameréida* without

engaging various academic debates and discourse.<sup>20</sup> The information found in this introduction is common knowledge at the Open City, and much of it has been more thoroughly discussed in previous academic scholarship, most notably in the work of Ann Pendleton-Jullian, Fernando Pérez Oyarzun, and Rodrigo Pérez de Arce. This introduction aims to be just that: an introduction of some basic context and terms of debate with regards to *Amereida*. By no means does this introduction trace new ground. This is especially the case since I already explore the ideas found in this introduction in greater depth in my own work, meaning that this introduction is by no means an original piece of scholarship (Woods, *Politics of the Dunes*, “The Present, the Modern, and Modernization,” “Americanismos”).

Another bibliographic issue arose with the translation of *Amereida*’s quotations of chronicles and letters. The initial solution to the translation of these fragments was to repeat the process of *Amereida*’s authors: find an appropriate translation and cite them word for word. This proved impossible, however, since *Amereida* was to be translated (not the original chronicles and letters), and the Spanish versions found in *Amereida* frequently diverge from the English translations. The end result is a compromise: the English translations of the chronicles and letters cited earlier are slightly modified in order to reflect the Spanish and the sentence structure found in *Amereida*. In the end, it is best to imagine these fragments with quotation marks around them (though quotation marks are not included in order to reproduce *Amereida*’s own lack of punctuation) with the knowledge that they have been altered in response to *Amereida*’s particularities.

Lastly, the reader will note that there are no translation notes. This is peculiar, especially for a critical edition of a translation. The reason is rather simple: the translation

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<sup>20</sup> I have done this elsewhere (Woods, *Politics of the Dunes*). Many of the ideas present in this introduction can be found in much more extended form in that work.

attempts to reproduce the *form* of *Ameréida* as faithfully as possible. The first edition of the poem included no punctuation, no authors listed, and no footnotes. It came to the reader as an unmarked brick. To introduce footnotes and translation comments would be to interrupt this form and alter the very structure of the text.

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